

Commonwealth and Foreign

SEMI-FASCIST JAPAN

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THE recurrent outbursts of Army radicalism in Japan, of which those of May 15th, 1932, and of February 26th, 1936, were the most striking and far-reaching, naturally suggest the question whether it is Japan's destiny to join the ranks of the world's Fascist States. Curious as it may seem, the semi-Fascist character of the present Japanese régime is perhaps the best guarantee against the emergence of a full-fledged Fascist State, of the German or Italian type.

Japan's constitutional position today is difficult to define. It is not a dictatorship in the familiar sense of that term. There is no permanent, irreplaceable, dominant "leader" of the type of Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini. Power in taking vital decisions of internal and foreign policy is diffused and divided in a baffling way between the senior statesmen who are close to the Throne, of whom the most eminent is the venerable Prince Saionji, the military and naval authorities, the bureaucracy and the representatives of the big business and financial interests.

The Army is credited with playing, and does play, an important part in shaping decisions on many questions of foreign and internal policy. Yet the Army lacks personification in the form of an outstanding, unmistakable chief. War Ministers change as rapidly as occupants of other Ministerial posts in Japan. General Sadao Araki, who during his term of office as War Minister three or four years ago attracted world-wide attention by his not infrequent utterances of flamboyant nationalism, is living today in quiet retirement and, in the judgement of most Japanese, has lost almost all his former influence.

If Japan is not a dictatorship it is even more obviously not a democracy. The powers of the Diet, always more circumscribed than those of a Western parliament, have become more and more shadowy since the occupation of Manchuria, which was a signal for an outbreak of political reaction in Japan itself. The Press is muzzled, not so absolutely as in Germany, Italy or the Soviet Union, but still quite effectively. Even the "Asahi," long a bulwark of liberalism in the Japanese Press, has become tame and lifeless since the rebellious officers directed a special assault against its premises on February 26th. There is just enough freedom of speech left in Japan for an unusually bold editor to announce occasionally that there is no freedom of speech. Labour demonstrations, when allowed at all, are accompanied by almost as many policemen as marchers. Since February 26th the police has enjoyed a freer hand in its favourite occupation of spy-hunting, and the atmosphere of secrecy which surrounds all State affairs and decisions in dictator-ruled lands is definitely increasing in Japan.

Some features of the Fascist Corporative State already exist in Japan. Discipline and regimentation are ensured as a result of the extraordinary powers and wide functions exercised by the police. The duties of the Japanese police go far beyond detecting and apprehending criminals and regulating traffic. They intervene in paternal fashion in the everyday lives of the people, telling the residents of a given district just when they are to carry out the annual compulsory housecleaning, offering advice, warnings and reprimands in domestic quarrels. They are apt to be the final court of compulsory arbitration in protracted labour disputes. They are constantly on the look-out for what a Japanese bureaucrat once, with agreeable although unconscious humour, described as "dangerous thoughts." "Police bans" are the bane of the Japanese newspaper editor, who is often told by the police, under penalty of fine and confiscation, to print nothing on some forbidden subject. Censorship of foreign publications has become markedly more severe in recent months.

Voluntary or enforced subordination of the individual for the supposed benefit of the general welfare is a characteristic of the post-War dictatorships which is fully shared by Japan. In contrast to the Chinese, who, with few exceptions, place

the family ties and obligations above everything else, the Japanese are prepared to make a second sacrifice of the individual personality on the altar of the nation. The cult of militant patriotism is very strong in Japan. Every schoolboy knows the story of the three "human bombs," Japanese soldiers who rushed forward to certain death in order to blow up barbed-wire entanglements which were holding up the Japanese advance during the fighting at Shanghai.

This propaganda for intense nationalism, fusing with the cult of profound reverence for the Emperor, which is especially stressed during the present period, is quite in harmony with Western Fascism. So is the tendency of the State to take an active part in the economic development of the country. Modern capitalism developed late in Japan, and naturally grew up more dependent on State aid and co-operation than the same system in other countries. Partnerships between the Government and private enterprise, such as the great South Manchuria Railway system, where the Government supplies part of the capital, guarantees a dividend, has a voice in the nomination of the directors, but allows private business methods to prevail in the management, are symbolic of Japan's State-aided capitalism.

Fondness for long-term planning is another characteristic which Japan shares with Communist and Fascist régimes. The portfolios of Japanese officials are fairly bursting with blue-prints for the future, among which may be mentioned a five-year plan for the rehabilitation of the chronically depressed Tohoku (the north-eastern section of the Main Island), a fifteen-year plan for the development of South Sakhalin, a twenty-year plan for Hokkaido, laying down specifications for the future of that northern island, from the number of peasant households which are to be settled to the number of horses which are to be bred, all reminiscent of the famous five-year plans of the Soviet Union.

But, while Japan possesses many features of the Corporative State and has certainly been influenced by the rise and spread of Fascism in recent years, just as its intelligentsia was strongly influenced by Russia during the 'twenties, several important elements in the Fascist scheme of things are still lacking. There is no omnipotent and infallible leader, no single ruling party; and Japan's achievements in mass propaganda and mass terrorism, while not altogether lacking, are considerably less impressive than those of the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy.

And it is just the semi-fascist character of the Japanese political, economic and social order that seems to set up barriers against the coming of Fascism of the standard European type. In super-policed Japan a Hitler or a Mussolini could not go very far in the direction of building up a mass party and personal following. The tradition, especially cherished by nationalist and military circles, that Japan must always be an empire ruled over by a line of Emperors, "unbroken through ages eternal," to quote a famous phrase in the Japanese Constitution, also militates against the emergence of an individual leader who would concentrate popular adulation on himself.

But, while a precise duplication of the European Fascist pattern seems out of the question, a gradual evolutionary trend in the direction of greater State control over national economic life, especially where strategic considerations are involved, and still more rigorous curbing of the feeble remnants of liberalism and individualism, are by no means unlikely. One can already see indications of such an evolution in the draft project for State control of the electrical power industry, which is now a subject of bitter discussion; in the military insistence on greater autarky and more provision for military and naval needs through such measures as the extraction of oil from coal, regardless of cost; in the growing tendency to see a spy in the travelling foreigner and a deep military secret in some commonplace bit of industrial or commercial information.